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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KHARTOUM 000118

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DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF S/E NATSIOS, AND AF/SPG  
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TAGS: PREL PGOV ECON KDEM SCUL AU UN SU US  
SUBJECT: U.S./SUDANESE RELATIONS: IN A LONG WAR, NO QUICK  
VICTORIES

REF: A. KHARTOUM 00094  
B. KHARTOUM 00106

Classified By: CDA Cameron Hume, Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: U.S. policy toward Sudan confronts a fundamental contradiction: although legally Sudan is organized as a nation-state, in reality Khartoum is an Arab capital struggling to rule a vast African hinterland. Ethnic conflict, economic change, and the declining legitimacy of Khartoum's rule cause instability throughout Sudan. Khartoum still controls the money and weapons, but in the South and in Darfur its rule is failing. U.S. policy, first to negotiate a North/South peace and now to end the conflict in Darfur, requires active engagement with this government in Khartoum. Although alternative policies, such as seeking either regime change in Khartoum or a division of the country, would not depend on relations with Khartoum; these policies conflict with the goals of humanitarian relief in Darfur and the economic development of the South. Over the next two years, U.S. policy needs to focus on two challenges, both of which require the cooperation of Khartoum: first, placing a competent UN peace-keeping force in Darfur and, second, fostering free and fair national elections to be held later no later than January 2009. End Summary.

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All Roads Lead to Khartoum  
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¶2. (C) In Sudan, Khartoum rules. The British ruled the country with just over 50 officers in its Sudan service by relying on traditional authorities and apathy in the provinces. That imperial tradition continued in independent Sudan. The government controls the capital, but elsewhere it accepts conditions approaching chaos. In fact, for more than a generation the government has fomented chaos by funding tribal militias in the South and in Darfur to confront other indigenous groups that have taken up arms against the garrisons in provincial capitals. The confluence of the Blue and White Niles in Khartoum and the convergence of the rail, road, and air transport networks in Khartoum re-enforce the capital's pre-eminence. Khartoum is the fulcrum of power in Sudan and the gateway between African Sudan and the rest of the world.

¶3. (C) Members of just three tribes hold the balance of power in Khartoum. The ethnic Arab Ja'aliyin, Shaiqiya, and Dunqulah tribes come from the Nile valley north and south of Khartoum. Members of these three tribes, which account for only a small percentage of Sudan's total population, dominate the ruling National Congress Party (NCP), as they have previous governments. Of the 26 senior members of the NCP,

President Bashir is from the Ja'aliyin (nine in total, including Presidential Assistant Nafie Ali Nafie and Presidential Advisor Maghzoub Al-Khalifa); Vice President Ali Osman Taha is from the Shaiqiya (seven in total, including Oil Minister Awad Al-Jaz and Intelligence Director Salah Abdallah Ghosh, and, the Dunqulah provide six (including Minister of Presidential Affairs Bakri Hassan Salah, Presidential Adviser Mustafa Ismail, and Minister of Defense Abd Al-Rahmin Mohamed Hussein). The same pattern repeats itself in the upper echelons of the military and security services. Although one of Sudan's two largest traditional political parties (the Umma Party) has relied more on support from the Ansari Islamic sect and population west of the Nile and the rival Democratic Unionist Party has relied on the Khatmiya sect and population east of the Nile, the tribes of the Nile valley controlled those parties as well. This long-term concentration of power is extraordinary, and it will not change in the near term.

¶4. (C) In 1989, a military coup brought President Bashir to power. Although many members of the government are civilians, the government stays in power because it controls the arms and the money. In the past year Bashir has increasingly turned to fellow military officers, such as Minister of Defense Hussein and Minister of Presidential Affairs Bakri, for advice. The money that Sudan receives for petroleum sales pours into the national treasury, not into the private economy. The government concentrates the benefits of the economic boom in Khartoum and the surrounding Nile Valley. There has been no benefit in Darfur, or in Eastern Sudan, or in the South. Bashir's government is a praetorian regime that rules by controlling the military and the money.

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¶5. (C) Hassan Al Turabi's National Islamic Front (NIF) was the political party behind the 1989 coup. Since then, Turabi has been pushed from power by his own followers, who renamed the party the National Congress Party. The NCP retains an Islamist agenda on social matters, and at times it appeals to the xenophobic instincts of Sudan's Arab tribes, for example in opposing UN peace-keeping in Darfur. It cultivates good relations with Iran and Hamas, but it is equally attentive to good relations with other states in the region. The character of the party remains Islamist, but any popular appeal it has is based less on ideology than on controlling the levers of power and the symbols of wealth. The bottom line is that the party chieftains, after 18 years in power, think far more about retaining power in Khartoum than they do about changing the world.

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Character of the Regime  
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¶6. (C) President Bashir remains more a military man than a politician. Rapid economic growth, which is set to see the economy expand by 400 percent between 2000 and 2012, has helped him to stay in office despite signing the CPA, which all opposition parties and many members of the NCP opposed, and despite repeated military defeats in Darfur. In public speeches he often makes hard statements that go beyond government policy. In official meetings he listens carefully and responds point-by-point. He is unlikely to change his position during a meeting, but he can change his position over time, as he has regarding the UN role in Darfur. He is a pragmatic decision-maker, but his criteria for decision-making reflect Sudanese, nationalist, Islamist culture.

¶7. (C) The installation of a Government of National Unity (GNU) in July 2005 did not weaken the NCP's grip on power. First Vice President Salva Kiir comes to Khartoum for only one or two days a month, and no minister from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) has gained real power.

The NCP controls the real power ministries (defense, finance, petroleum, interior, intelligence). In the past year, Vice President Taha, one of the two architects of the CPA and an advocate of greater cooperation with the international community, has been pushed toward the margins of power, and NCP leaders associated with hard-line policies have become more important. After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and formation of the Government of National Unity, the policies of Khartoum have hardened.

¶8. (C) These rulers of Khartoum design Sudanese foreign policy in their own interest, as they see it. They have built strong economic relations with China, India, and Malaysia, their main partners in the strategic petroleum sector. They have diversified sources of arms (e.g., Belarus, Ukraine, China, Iran). They have emphasized Third World solidarity, hosting recent summits of the Arab League, the African Union (AU), and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP). They have correct, but not warm, relations with European countries. They would like to have &normal8 relations with the United States -- an end to economic sanctions and the designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism, some debt relief, accession to the WTO, and an exchange of ambassadors. However, beyond maintaining cooperation in fighting terrorism, they seem to have given up seeking closer relations.

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Choices for U.S. Policy  
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¶9. (C) John Garang's vision was "A New Sudan," one in which all Sudanese would be treated fairly and even a Southerner could become president. The USG backed that vision in the negotiations that produced the CPA. As long as the NCP and SPLM remain committed to that agreement, including the plan for free and fair national elections by January 2009, the politics of Sudan can change from the inside by Sudanese, rather than mainly as a response to outside pressure. Now the death of Garang, the ongoing conflict in Darfur (Ref A), and problems in implementing the CPA (Ref B) have all made the transformation of Sudanese politics more difficult.

¶10. (C) Ever since the 1989 coup, the United States has applied economic sanctions against Sudan. The list of sanctions has increased by executive action (e.g., inclusion on the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism) and by legislative action (e.g., the Darfur Peace and Accountability

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Act). The campaign to encourage disinvestment from firms doing business in Sudan is beginning to have a real impact on European firms, who often raise money in U.S. financial markets. Now the United States has practically no trade or investment in Sudan, but it is Sudan's largest donor. Although represented at only the charge d'affaires level, the U.S. embassy has good access to senior regime figures. Whatever the validity and impact of U.S. sanctions policy, the USG cannot promote an end to the conflict in Darfur or re-activate political change inside Sudan with only sanctions. Progress will require some active engagement with the Khartoum government.

¶11. (C) There are at least two policy alternatives that would respond, in part, to the fundamental contradiction that although Sudan is legally a nation state, in reality Khartoum is an Arab capital ruling a vast African hinterland. One such approach is to promote a "Two Sudan Policy," with strong, open support for the South in any dispute with the North over the CPA, economic investments that tie the South to East Africa rather than to Khartoum, and direct USG training and supplies for the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). Such a policy would aim at the independence of the South either through the planned 2011 referendum or by unilateral action. It would leave in place essentially military regimes with tribal bases of power in both Khartoum

and Juba. A Two Sudan Policy would complicate USG efforts to resolve the crisis in Darfur, and it would put at risk the significant Sudanese cooperation in the war on terror and USG concerns for regional security.

¶12. (C) A "Regime Change" policy could prove exceptionally hard to implement successfully. Sudan has no tradition of rule other than by Khartoum's dominant three tribes, and a successor regime from those tribes would retain much of the perspective of the Bashir government. In fact, much of the opposition to Bashir is from elements that oppose the peace deal with the South, invoke Islamist slogans, and reject sharing power with the "African" tribes from Darfur, Eastern Sudan, or Southern Sudan. Regime change might be consistent with an even stronger sanctions policy, but it is not consistent with U.S. humanitarian objectives in Darfur or with steps to transform the Sudanese state.

¶13. (C) As a point of reference, two other policy alternatives are being practiced or advocated, but neither seems suitable for the United States. China engages Khartoum essentially as a business partner, without looking too closely at internal affairs. However, even the Chinese are beginning to acknowledge that their business interests may be put at risk by insecurity in Darfur and in the South. The International Crisis Group, which advocates maximum pressure on Sudan and minimum engagement with Khartoum, would effectively sacrifice humanitarian operations in Darfur, international engagement in promoting the CPA, and long-term Western economic interests in Sudan.

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Staying the Course  
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¶14. (C) No policy is going to produce a quick, secure peace in Darfur or a rapid transformation of Sudanese political culture. In the context of the state failure that now envelops Darfur, the deployment of a UN peace-keeping force offers the best way to contain and to reverse the tide of chaos. As explained in Ref A, the attitudes of President Bashir have shifted somewhat and the challenge now is to widen that opening. As for Sudan's internal transformation, the two-year period before planned national elections is neither too short nor too long, but perhaps just the right amount of time, to push past the stumbling blocks in the CPA (Ref B). Sudan's chronic instabilities cannot be resolved easily, but active U.S. engagement can shift the Khartoum government toward a better path.

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